

### GETTING A JUMP ON THANKSGIVING

--I'd like to begin this morning by making a sort of public service announcement. It is this: There are now only forty-four shopping days left to Christmas.

I'm sure that's enough to make you sick in your stomach. It does, however, underscore the fact that we are rapidly approaching that vortex which evidences its menacing swirling at the end-of-November-and-December holidays. The older I get, the more it feels like the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas are a sort of sling shot which hurls one into the new year.

Since Thanksgiving, then, comes and goes as something of an annual blur, I am suggesting that it might be prudent for us this year to get a jump on it by beginning our observance of it early. Most congregations will be offering their Thanksgiving programs and messages from the pulpit next Sunday. That will be the case here as well. I am thinking, though, that, given the speed with which Thanksgiving typically comes and goes, it might be well additionally to prepare ourselves for it already this morning.

--Probably the biggest problem with our observing of Thanksgiving in such a typical hurry is that we rarely get to experience it as we should.

Since the fourth Thursday of November is usually on us and past us in a flash, too often we don't really get to count our blessings, let alone feel grateful for them to an all-provident God. We are simply too busy with all the other details--cleaning and appropriately decorating the house, working out all the arrangements with respect to whom is coming this year to sit at our tables, making the trip to the supermarket to buy all the fixings, and then spending the several hours cooking and baking in advance of the expected big-feed.

You can plainly see why that leaves me wondering: Where exactly in all this frenetic holiday chase are we to have the experience of thanksgiving?

--Our questionable, not-so-meaningful contemporary practices associated with this time of the year show clearly that the psalmist, in this morning's reading, has it right.

Psalm 130 is identified simply as one of "thanksgiving for God's goodness." Like other psalms of this genre, it is not written for use only during the month of November, let alone for just a single day within the month of November. It is appropriate for any time. In other words, thanksgiving is for all the time. Thanksgiving is not just a day; it is to be a way of life, every day.

"Bless the Lord . . . and do not forget all [God's] benefits," the psalmist encourages. God forgives us, he declares further, heals us, spares us, and honors us. God is gracious to us, labors for us, loves us, and all the while goes on remembering us.

Surely, if we will give attention to and actually absorb these sentiments, we will likely find that

they are the sort of thoughts which help us to feel lighter and stand taller, because they emphasize the spiritual truth of God's being our abiding Companion, and Partner, and Friend. These are just the sort of sentiments which, if stitched into our daily consciousness, would afford our lives courage by which to counter our anxieties, hope by which to transcend our dreariness, and peace by which to outgrow our chaotic and compulsive hurrying.

Yes, it is well that we pause, if only for these moments, to contemplate the deeper meaning of the season, before we are once more quickly caught up in all its characteristic hustle and bustle.

As the psalmist illustrates for us, there is something spiritually compelling--and more, something psychologically constructive--about becoming aware of and expressing that for which we are thankful. Leaving it unacknowledged, unsaid, unfelt, is to leave us impoverished and disadvantaged. In fact, says the psalmist, God "satisfies [us] with good as long as [we] live" (103.5a). In other words, not to recognize that for which we are to be genuinely thankful, not to respond to that in any meaningful way, may be the very definition of not really being alive.

--A final story, then, by which to jumpstart our thanksgiving experience this year.

A man and his wife are having some problems at home and are dealing with their conflict by giving to each other the "silent treatment."

As the man prepares to retire for the night, it suddenly occurs to him that the next day he needs his wife to wake him at 5 a.m. for an early morning business flight. Not wanting to be the first to break the silence--and so "lose" in this cold stalemate--he writes her a note on a piece of paper, leaving it on her bed stand, where he knows she will see it. It says simply, "Please wake me up at 5 a.m."

The next morning the man is startled awake just after 7:30, knowing that clearly he has missed his flight by a couple hours. Furious, he is about to go and see why his wife has failed to waken him, as requested, when he notices a piece of paper on his side of the bed.

The paper says, "It is 5 a.m. Wake up."

See what I mean? And you weren't sure that you had anything to be thankful for!

Surely, where Thanksgiving is concerned, it's time for all of us to begin to wake up.